

ANTIQUARIAN RESEARCH AT THE FEURT SITE A MAJOR FORT ANCIENT COMMUNITY IN SCIOTO COUNTY OHIO

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Located north of Portsmouth Ohio in Scioto County the well-known Feurt Site has attracted both researcher and collector interest for at least 125 years. The Feurt community probably first received professional attention in the summer of 1896 when the legendary researcher/ formidable archaeologist, Warren K. Moorehead, with the cursory support of The Ohio Archaeological and Historical Society, led a small team of diggers to the site. Moorehead discovered three mostly flattened mounded features all containing burials. Employing his typical fast-paced excavation strategy Moorehead examined only a small portion of the site's most prominent features. His brief commentary on his work is as follows, "The afternoon of July 13 th we went to Mr. Feurt's farm where we opened the smaller mound and dug the large ones the following day. They are located on the second terrace. The small one is two by twenty five feet, the next four by fifty feet, the largest six by sixty feet." Moorehead's cursory field work episode yielded 33 burials most "without notable burial goods."

It was typical in the early 1900's for members of the local collecting fraternity to anxiously wait for spring cultivation activities on the Feurt Site plateau (Figure 1) so that they could collect specimens from the artifact-rich site. They knew they were walking over the location of a major prehistoric community, one richly endowed with the trappings of its life history. The Fort Ancient Feurt Site was situated adjacent to the lower Scioto River, the locus of a number of multi-cultural sites that were heavily utilized during the prehistoric era.

There were a number of field hunters of the period at Feurt including the multi-generation Wertz family, S. P. Adams, John Welty, Morris Hicks, Paul Esselborn (the primary early excavator at the neighboring Tremper Mound), and the Columbus Ohio team of Phil Kientz and Dr. Stanley Cope-land. It seemed that almost every serious Indian relic collector from the Portsmouth area and many further north became curators of Feurt Site artifacts.

The nearby Feurt Hill Ohio pipestone quarries were an important source of raw material for the artifacts made by the prehistoric residents of the Feurt Village. The plentiful pipestone deposits outcrop on the summit of hills directly east of the site. Ohio pipestone was extensively quarried by the Feurt people all along the crest of the massive hill. The light gray to dark red pipestone deposits averaged about three to four feet in thickness. Pipestone was used to manufacture a variety of specialty artifacts, such as pipes. The pipestone in

its raw form was relatively soft and was easily carved into refined looking artifacts that accepted and retained a high degree of polish. Figure 2 shows an array of Feurt Site pipes several of which were crafted from showy pipestone from the Feurt Hill quarries.

On July 5, 1916 William C. Mills of The Ohio Archaeological and Historical Society began what was to become an extensive examination of the Feurt Site. His work included the re-examination of Moorehead's perfunctory work some twenty years earlier. From the smallest of Moorehead's designated cemeteries which was actually triple the size Moorehead had determined, Mills uncovered 102 burials. He stated that in many cases both whole and broken implements and ornaments were present either in the fill dirt or in the immediate vicinity of the interments. Mills also identified an unusual site burial practice. The usually flexed interments were placed directly on undisturbed subsoil and covered with mounded earth, suggesting minimal preparation of gravesites.

An example of Mills' descriptions of his work in the cemetery was Burial #75. "This was a child of perhaps seven years of age. The body was placed in natural gravel and sand on its left side and arms extended parallel with the body, but the legs were flexed closely to the body. Around the neck was a necklace made of a perforated canine of the gray wolf, three effigy bear canines, made of wood and covered with copper, and a large shell gorget."

Mills' burial excavations continued at mound 2 at the west edge of the plateau. This activity produced another 137 burials. Most of the inhumations were placed on their sides in a flexed position with their appendages close to the body. Serrated triangular points and shell ornaments were found with several burials. The second earth mounded cemetery measured 90 feet by 45 feet and was 8 feet high.

Burial mound 3 was singularly interesting because it contained the re-deposited bodies of at least twelve individuals. They had been interred elsewhere and moved to mound 3. All had missing body parts such as their head, arms and legs. An isolated fireplace was found at the original ground level in this cemetery. It was filled with charcoal and large pieces of broken vessels. Was this the one-time site of a feast /celebration honoring the dead? This cemetery, by Mills' measurements, was six feet high at its maximum elevation and extended 90 feet by 112 feet. One hundred and one burials were found. Several of the burials had

necklaces made of materials such as raptor bird wing bones, shell beads and the canine teeth of mountain lions and gray wolves.

Overall the Feurt village including the cemetery features encompassed about four acres. It was mostly saturated with artificial deposits including animal bones, mussel shells, whole and broken bone implements and various bone and shell ornaments. Situated under these deposits was a uniform layer of gravel also containing artifacts. Much of this layer was hauled away by gravel haulers who in the course of events became relic collectors.

The profusion of bird and animal bones, and mussel shells indicated the Feurt Site residents depended on hunting and aquatic resources for a major part of their sustenance. From the bones of the animals they killed for food they made a wide variety of implements and ornaments. They also crafted numerous pottery, flint and stone items. Mills also recovered residues of agricultural products throughout the village especially parched corn and acorn shells.

The Feurt people must have valued their leisure time activities. Engraved discoidals or game stones were used by the residents in a bowling-type game called Chunky where wagering on outcomes was an important ingredient. A number of discoidals were recovered by Mills and his crew usually close to home-sites. Most were decorated with unique engraved decorations such as punctates, balanced incised lines, expanding circles and turkey track designs (Figure 3).

Mills noted that for the most part the village burial grounds were placed at some distance away from home sites. The mostly teepee-like Feurt residences seemed to lack permanence. For example there were only two instances when the fireplaces inside them were mended over time. The Feurt Indians had almost no refuse pits. Instead of gathering up garbage and placing animal bone residues, shell and other waste materials in an excavated pit the Feurt villagers simply covered up their waste items with fresh soil. Some of the soil-covered residue piles ended up being three to four feet high. The bones of the Indian dog (*Canis*) were often found among the waste materials especially close to the house sites. Man's best friend apparently had a major presence at the Feurt Site.

Mills found an unusually large number of pipes at the Feurt Site. He indicated pipes were found in every part of the village and likely were used throughout its existence. It is difficult to quantify the number of whole,

unfinished and broken Feurt pipes recovered at the site but the number could have been at least several hundred. Many of an unusually large number of broken examples were likely damaged while in use or during the manufacturing process. Most of the pipes were found among dwelling deposits. Many kinds of stone were used to manufacture Feurt pipes including Feurt Hill pipestone, limestone, sandstone, laurentian slate and hematite. Pipestone seemed to be the preferred crafting material. Almost all of the pipes were small and were probably intended for individual use. Popular pipe styles were elbow, vasiform, ovoid, lens and a platform type similar to the earlier Hopewell style. The elbow form seems to have been the most popular configuration.

The photographic display of various artifacts from the Feurt Site duplicates specimens recovered by Mills at the site. The pictured artifacts are from old-time collections.

Figure 1 is a survey map of the Feurt site circa 1916. The oblong shaped rings in the picture are cemetery locations.

Figure 2 shows the array of Feurt pipes previously referenced. Left to right in the top row are reddish pipestone specimens, a lens shaped gray pipestone pipe and an ovoid slate pipe. Below at the left is a primitive human face pipe made of yellowish pipestone and an iron-rich oval sandstone specimen featuring an engraved parallel line design.

Figure 3, referenced earlier, is a group of engraved sandstone discoidals displaying various designs. All but one are perforated. The discs are largely flat with slightly concave surfaces. Several have surrounding ridges at their outer edges. The un-perforated example, lower row middle, has four incised turkey tracks in a balanced pattern. The pictured examples are from the Meuser collection.

Figure 4 shows various flint pieces; the three examples at the top are knives and the remaining examples, bow and arrow points. Several have serrated edges. All were apparently crafted using area flint materials.

Figure 5 shows a grouping of various Feurt artifacts. Starting at the top, left to right, are a sandstone paint cup, a sandstone discoidal, an engraved sandstone ring, and two sandstone elbow pipes. Below are a turtle carapace probably used as a dipper or scoop, a mussel shell hoe and a possible sandstone game piece or cone.

Figure 6 is a group of bone tools and ornaments. Surrounding the tool assemblage is a necklace made of bone beads cut from sections of wing bones of several large birds, perhaps, hawks or blue herons. In the middle is a highly polished perforated bone awl, a bone whistle and two bone beamers or scrapers. All of these artifacts

were found in abundance at the site.

The Feurt Site represents a period of Fort Ancient cultural explosion in the Ohio River basin region. The Feurt community may have served as the home for many hundreds of people during its heyday. The fact that over 500 burials have been exposed at this location during its excavated history serves to highlight its size and importance. Both Moorehead in a limited way and Mills to a major extent exposed its significance and left a fertile field for future research.

A substantial part of the site has been removed by collector exploitation or covered over by industrial development, gravel mining, farming, surface flooding and erosion but as chronicled in a recent Ohio Archaeologist some of the site's treasures still remain to be exposed.

Reference:

1916, Mills, William C. The Feurt Mounds And Village Site, Ohio Archaeological and Historical Quarterly, Vol. 26 93, Columbus, Ohio

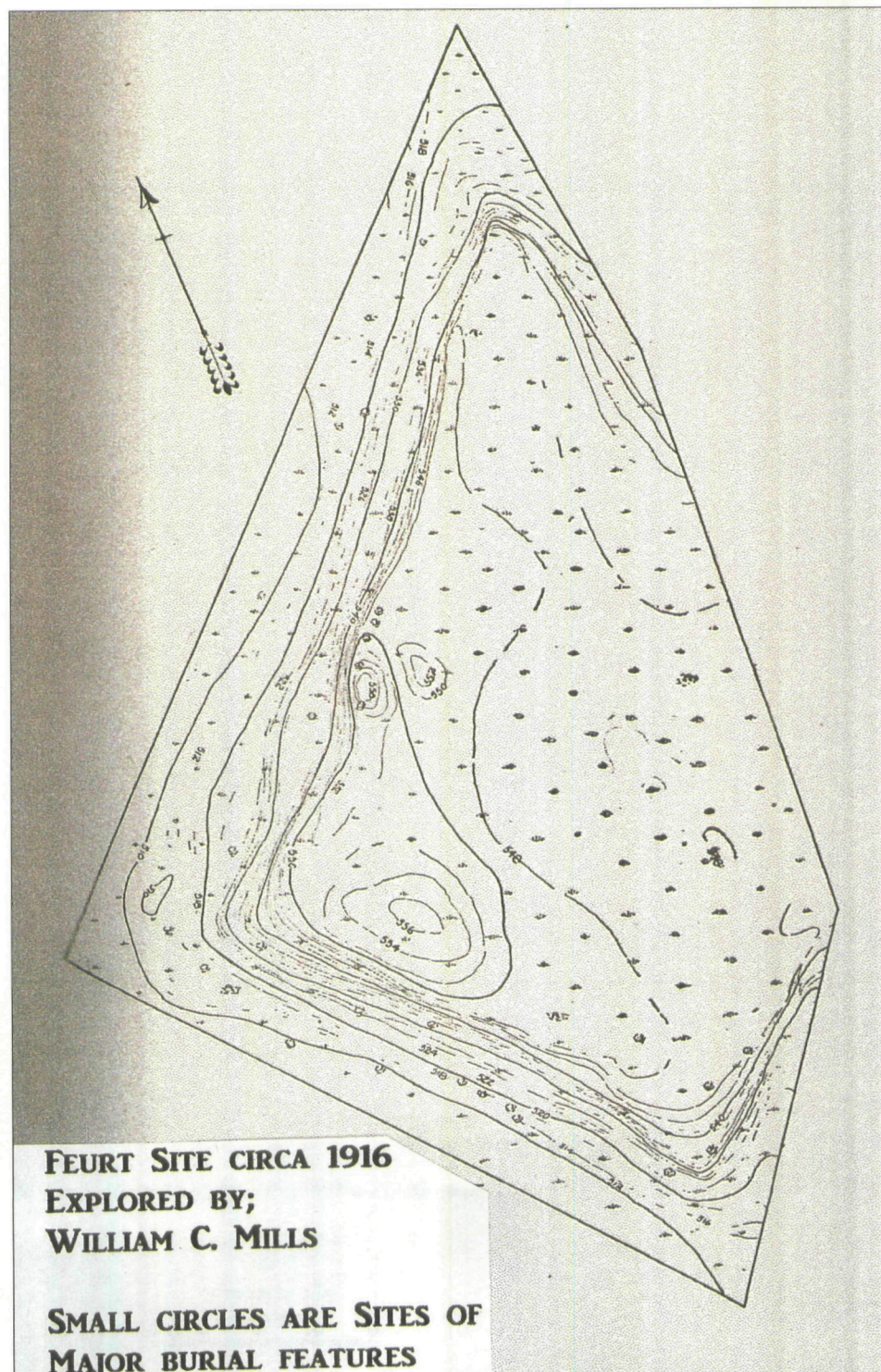


Figure 1. 1916 Survey map of the Feurt Site.



Figure 2 (Gehlbach).
Group of pipes,
various stylizations.



Figure 3 (Gehlbach)
Engraved sandstone
discoidals.



Figure 4 (Gehlbach) Flint tools, knives and triangular points.



Figure 5 (Gehlbach) Miscellaneous artifacts; paint cup, discoidal, child's ring, elbow pipes, turtle shell scoop, shell hoe, game piece.

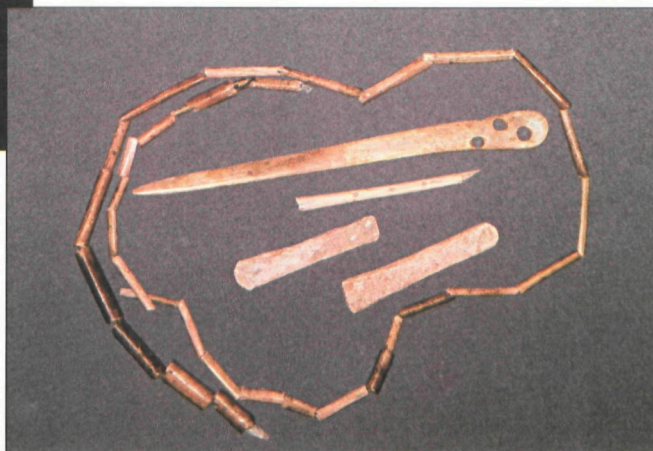


Figure 6 (Gehlbach) Bone necklace and tools.